

Planning the Perfect Bath

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The bathroom can be an expensive room in your home. Regardless of how much you want to spend on your bathrooms, careful and thoughtful design can help create spaces that go well beyond what you have spent on your fixtures and finishes.

Start by clarifying your needs within your overall planning. These days, it's common to have a master suite and a second primary bathroom to serve other bedrooms. If a bathroom will serve only one bedroom most of the time, then consider making it a suite, as well, with a second door from an adjacent hall. If you are outside a lot, you may wish to put a bathroom just inside the backdoor, near a mudroom. As you locate your bathrooms remember some basic guidelines. Avoid doors opening directly off living areas, especially if the toilet is opposite the door. If your bathroom or powder room is adjacent primary living spaces, try to create a small alcove from which to enter.

Determine what fixtures you wish to include in each bathroom. Bathrooms near primary living spaces may only need a lavatory and toilet - unless you have teenagers that all need to shower at the same time. A simple cabinet works well for an informal half bath. For a more formal bathroom or powder room, consider a pedestal sink with some shelving, or a small freestanding cabinet for towels and toilet paper. Provide natural light wherever possible. Powder rooms are often made very small. While a sink and toilet don't take up much room, it can feel cramped if minimum dimensions are used. A little extra space creates a more relaxed atmosphere and room for additional décor and plants. I am dismayed at how often doors are undersized and placed so close to the bathroom counter that the trim has to be scribed around the countertop.

A bathroom that serves a number of bedrooms will likely need considerable counter space to hold toiletries and incidentals. A second lavatory sink may be a good option with some families. A combined tub/shower usually serves most family needs. Although placing the tub along the end wall is the most efficient layout, it usually negates natural light. If rotating the tub so that it is parallel to the counter isn't an option, then consider a skylight. These bathrooms need lots of cabinet space and dedicated linen storage. Where the floor plan allows, a laundry chute in or adjacent to the bathroom is a great idea.

Today, concepts in master bathrooms have opened up whole new possibilities in design. And the rooms are getting larger and larger, as many people demand a oversized whirlpool tub and a separate oversized shower. If you desire a separate cubicle for the toilet, the floor area may be equivalent to an average sized bedroom. Of course, the tub works best in a corner location surrounded by windows so that it can have lots of light. Although large jetted tubs are desirable, they use up a lot of water and take up considerable room. While many people like a step, I believe it is more difficult to step down into a tub. Because a soaking or jetted tub is equated with comfort and relaxation, there is a trend to move tubs into the master bedroom itself. The bedroom usually has a softer, warmer ambience and perhaps a fireplace or a spouse relaxing in bed. Whatever you choose, insulate your tub and use a large supply line. Some tubs even are even designed to maintain a desired temperature.

Showers can come as kits or can be custom built and tiled in many creative ways. You can add permanent or fold down benches and steam generators. If space permits, you may be able to configure the shower so it doesn't need a door. Be sure to recess covey holes for toiletries into the shower walls and make sure there are towel bars within reach. Hand-held or multiple showerheads are an option as are foot spouts for testing the water temperature.

Pedestal sinks can be elegant but usually require additional shelving and cabinet space. A luxury may include 'his and hers' double sinks or a lowered makeup counter.

For aesthetic appearances, place the toilet away from bedroom sightlines and consider using low water or quiet flush toilets to minimize noise. Take the time to research the variety of fixtures available. Consider universal design concepts in your bathroom. This may mean choosing lever handles and anti-scald devices on faucets, or installing hand-held shower units.

Free wall space can often be a premium in master bathrooms. Although large opening windows are a wonderful feature, if privacy is an issue, you can use glass block or skylights to bring in additional natural light. Allow plenty of room for towel bars. In regions with severe winter temperatures, you may need to avoid plumbing in exterior walls.

Choose finishes that are sanitary and easy to clean, yet evoke comfort. Because “easy to clean” can mean “hard and shiny”, neutral colors can warm up a cold bathroom. Color will also influence the apparent size of the bathroom as well as the mood. Color can be used to emphasize or downplay fixtures. Light colors such as yellow will tend to make it bright and cheery and larger while dark greens and blues will evoke luxury while making the room appear smaller. Keeping vertical lines to a minimum will expand the sense of space. If you have logs in your bathrooms, consider tiles that are both textured and rustic in appearance. Floor tiles should be large and slip-resistant.

Ventilation is always important in bathrooms. Provide natural ventilation where possible and always provide a high-capacity fan. Fog-free mirrors are available now. If you have forced-air heating, locate the registers in the kick space of a cabinet instead of the walls where they are more obtrusive. Wall-mounted heaters with quiet fans can give extra warmth, but still leave you with a cold floor. If you have hydronic radiant heat in your home, then you will already have a warm floor and the option of towel warmers. If you don't have hydronic radiant heat, then you can still heat the floor with low voltage mats laid beneath your tile.

Log homes present unique challenges in bathrooms. If your log profile is round on the interior, then there are obvious obstacles in installing showers, tubs and cabinets. This

can be compounded by movement of the log. Thus, no fixed element can be attached to the logs without provision for movement. Some designers like to specify a wall independent of the log wall, to which the fixtures and cabinets are attached, or consider a flat log profile flat with plywood mounted to the walls, so that you don't lose valuable space.

Like any other space in your home, carefully review your bathroom needs, wishes and options. With a little creativity, your bathrooms can be comfortable but and an expression of your creativity as well.